The Purpose of Education: A Talk on Teaching our Students How to Think

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Education is an inherent part of every society, dating back to the beginning of recorded history. It plays an essential role in developing the skills and knowledge base of future generations, as well as helps to shape the goals for a community and its people. That said, the purpose of education and what is expected of elementary educators in our current world seems to be up for debate. The public, teachers, and society at large all have their own opinions, not to mention how our needs for society shift with each changing decade. By delving into works by education philosophers, reformers, and researchers and applying these definitions to my own personal experience with education, I attempt to define education's purpose in the context of our modern world.

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Process Analysis Statement

Tackling the topic of defining the purpose of education was not the simplest of topics I could have chosen. Though the original thought seemed basic, I realized quickly the research and questioning involved with this topic would be anything but plain. I knew I desired a thesis which beautifully merged my various experiences and identities from college, but starting out in January of my junior year I was not quite there. It was not until that summer when I was talking to my mother on our front porch I recognized I was most passionate about education, in how I viewed it as a student and a teacher. Having the ability to perceive both sides I wanted to know where I fit in the profession. I had been asked many times why I wanted to be an educator, but I had never asked the profession itself why it existed. This was a burning question I had as I quickly began taking on more professional roles. As with most burning questions I have, I needed to seek an answer. My thesis topic was born!

By May of 2018 I was taking the same approach with my thesis as I was with my entire Honors College experience, and that was with one goal in mind: deep thought. I wanted to delve into the purpose of education fully and see as many sides as possible. After reaching the bottom, my plan was to bring all the gold to the surface. This began with a blind research of why education existed and how it has evolved over time. Though fascinating, it was quite broad. I was open to all time periods, countries, and types of schools. This was far too wide of a scope, and surely would have resulted in at least 500 pages of writing before I was even close to a succinct conclusion.

In the fall semester of 2018, I was enrolled in an Educational Foundations course where we would be researching various aspects of education, like reform, diversity, policy, history, and (of course) purpose. At the time, I had narrowed down my scope to thoughts and research by educators I had heard of in class, but was still looking back as far as Vygotsky and Piaget. This was still too much of a jump if I wanted to define education for myself as a soon-to-be graduate in modern day America. Simultaneously, I was reading more contemporary pieces and having discussions about the 20th and 21st centuries in my education class. Using the resources from this course, I spring-boarded into a specific sector of my overall question, looking only at Contemporary American texts to help me. This made researching much less daunting and more tangible. I focused on Dewey, Gardner, and Diane Ravitch among some other individuals who had their own theories on education's purpose and where it would lead us in the future. Compiling this into a research paper was challenging. I had always wanted my thesis to be more creative and focused on thought rather than facts. At this point in my work I had to remind myself the research would be used to back up my creative work in the end.

Another challenge I faced was finding the time to complete my thesis. My reasoning was not a lack of motivation, but instead a massive flood of ideas and inspiration, as well as a difficulty with time management. After reading two articles and analyzing how they worked together for my overall goal I would be stuck in the theory and history which connected the two. This slowed my process down significantly and forcibly stuck me in the thick of the research. The issue with looking too deeply is you forget where you are going; I needed constant self-reminders, and had to brainstorm to

redirect myself each time I met with my advisor. After a couple of long nights and eager mornings I had found a small group of sources that fit my need more precisely. These five sources guided my analysis paper, where I tried my best to define the purpose of education from a historical and theoretical perspective. Though this was not my favorite part of my thesis work, it was arguably some of the most critical as the research would serve as my foundation.

After fall was over, and spring came with the challenges of student teaching and applying for jobs, I saw I was ready to begin turning the research into a written keynote—the creative aspect of my thesis. I reviewed the theories and ideologies I had written about in the previous paper and began to analyze the research more and pull out the most essential pieces for the speech. As I wrote my keynote, the audience became clearer to me as did the connection to my past experiences as a student. I would speak to individuals just like myself who were training or were almost finished training to become elementary educators. This realization helped me focus my language and energy on something I was more comfortable with. I could speak ~~more~~ fluidly of what I had learned in the texts, and was ready to add my personal history to the mix.

That is when my thesis flipped on its side and the fog was lifted. I could see there was no true purpose of education; it all depended on the society and what it valued, the cultural standards and expectations, and so much more. Instead, the place where I could focus education was what needed to be defined. At this point in my educational career as both a student and professional it was clear to me that meaningful and effective education was produced when students were not asked to memorize or learn,

but to think. This was at the core of all my honors college classes and memories, making them the influential and life-changing moments they were. This was also the element I noticed was lacking in systematic grading and state-wide assessments. Academic standards and skill development were equally important to the education of the whole child, and I had seen this first hand. I had been hearing terms like “student-centered learning” and “meaningful education” for the past four years, but for the first time it made sense to me.

In the end, I did not make the ground-breaking discovery I had anticipated. Sensibly, there was no way to make this discovery as I was looking into the past and reading what others had discovered for themselves. I surprised myself at the number of sources I perused on my quest and the persistence I showed despite the constant questioning and uncertainty. I began this thesis hoping to find a way to share my experiences within education simultaneously with the expectations our society had set for them, and I feel I succeeded in that. I made the claim we needed more thought-driven and student-led opportunities in school by doing so in the most inherent way: creating a thesis which forced me to think for myself.

Keynote Transcript

Intended audience: Beginning Elementary Educators/ Pre-Service Teachers at an Educational Conference

Approximate time: 12 minutes

What is the purpose of education? It seems like a simple answer, doesn't it? To learn…of course. But is that the only task we are asking of our elementary teachers today? To make sure our children learn. And if so, learn what?

I am not alone in this search for answers. In fact, as I began to do my research I found article after article with a similar title to this very keynote. Today I do not intend to repeat their points to you. Instead, I want to share with you---through both my research and experiences—what I feel the purpose of education is and how we, as elementary educators, can resolve to keep it.

I know how much teachers love stories, and storytelling, so I will keep this one brief. I was a straight-A student, honor roll, the whole nine yards in high school. I knew how to keep my grades up and thoroughly enjoyed going to school. Upon graduation, I was proud of myself and the accomplishments I had. However, something was missing. It felt like I did not do anything strenuous to get where I was. On top of that, I was ranked: 33rd in my graduating class of 605. Now, I know that does not sound too terrible, but it didn't make any sense. I knew I was doing the best I could, though I knew I didn't work as hard as at least 100 people who were ranked below me. I also tied for 33rd with my best friend. How does that work? You can't have two people in 33rd. Unless the kid who

was actually number 605 was told he was 604 and went on forever thinking he/she was second to last.

Needless to say, I was a good student. When I got to college, I realized very quickly that meant nothing. I had to re-learn *everything*: how to study, how to be organized, how to write, how to read, how to think…. And, at first, it didn't make any sense at all. I assumed college classes would be similar to my high school ones in that I could navigate through them with as much or as little thought as I wanted. Not to sound cocky, but I understood the system, and I knew it. Looking back now, students ranked 1-50 did too. College was a whole different ball game in that I was required to be something other than a student… I was required to be a learner.

Education has been defined countless times over the centuries. With each passing definition, there is a new goal and a new age of school reform to be had. Students are expected to learn differently, and teachers are given a new set of directions to shake their whole year's plan to the core: this core being the reason they became educators.

So, I ask you, what do you think the purpose of education is? And what is the goal?

Two men by the names of Doug Belshaw and Andy Stewart founded a nonpartisan organization in 2011 titled Purpos/ed. It was an open dialogue on social media that encouraged people to try defining the purpose of education and lead to conversations and individual blogs. Here we see their facebook page littered with entries like:

- “The purpose of education is….”
    - to care
    - to nurture curiosity, confidence and character
    - to stop boring and start building
    - to prepare us for life
    - to let learning happen
    - a socially-negotiated contract
    - connection
    - to nurture optimism

As you are witnessing, it is clear there are many opinions and much confusion about the purpose of education.

I tried to narrow this down with some research and define it concretely. I am going to highlight two definitions that stood out to me.

To start, we have Howard Gardner, an American developmental psychologist, professor, and author. In his book, *The Unschooled Mind,* he argues education is to “yield a greater understanding in students” leading them to become “well-educated” (Gardner, 145, 116). Similar to how a factory produces parts, a school is to produce educated members of society. Then what is the goal? To build students into what society needs them to be. For example, Gardner highlights the values of a Confucian

society as a person who can read calligraphic character, play music, and draw a bow (Gardner, 127). This is what society has deemed “well-educated” due to their time and place in history; however cool it may be, drawing a bow is not a skill worth placing on a resume in the 21st century. It can be argued, from this definition, that the goal society has for education is constantly changing, causing one of the issues at the heart of this study.

Second, let’s see what Diane Ravitch, a more contemporary contributer has to say. Diane is a passionate and well-known author of over twenty books regarding school and education reform. She refers to the core mission of institutions as a way to “live up to the nation’s ideals” creating a utopian-esque expectation (Ravitch, 25). The impossible task: produce citizens who fit the ideal for a broken world. Not only this, but she goes on to remind readers that schools have the responsibilities to both provide for society and listen to society at the same time.

The theme I began to sense was one of prophecy fulfillment. Society called for change, and was handing the baton to schools. This made me wonder what our society valued the most in terms of educating the youth. What better place to look than at career sites. If the average human spends more than an average amount of their days working, it is likely this will become their footprint on society. Therefore, it can be argued what students learn in school contributes to their future professions: which ones they want, which ones they earn, and which ones they don’t.

In the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Survey for 2022, the following skills will be in increased demand according to their current prominence. With growing relevancy, we see many transferable skills regardless of the position. Let's look at the following list of skills to see what we can expect in the next decade of careers:

Trending, 2022
Analytical thinking and innovation
Active learning and learning strategies
Creativity, originality and initiative
Technology design and programming
Critical thinking and analysis
Complex problem-solving
Leadership and social influence
Emotional intelligence
Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation
Systems analysis and evaluation

Now, I want you to consider the classroom. Where do these show up in our curriculum? Let's start where every good teacher goes…. the standards. Here is a list of some typical Indiana standards from varying grade levels and content matter.

How do these compare?

1st Grade English: 1. SL.2.3 Listen to others, take turns speaking about the topic, and add one's own ideas in small group discussions or tasks.

1st Grade Math: 1.M.3: Find the value of a collection of pennies, nickels, and dimes.

1st Grade Science: 1.ESS.4 Develop solutions that could be implemented to reduce the impact of humans on the land, water, air, and/or other living things in the local environment.

3rd Grade English: 3.W.1 Write routinely over a variety of time frames and for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences; apply reading standards to write in response to literature and nonfiction texts.

3rd Grade Math: 3.M.7: Find perimeters of polygons given the side lengths or by finding an unknown side length.

5th Grade English: 5. RV.2.4 Apply knowledge of word structure elements, known words, and word patterns to determine meaning (e.g., word origins, common Greek and Latin affixes and roots, parts of speech).

5th Grade Science: 3-5. E.2 Construct and compare multiple plausible solutions to a problem based on how well each is likely to meet the criteria and constraints of the problem.

I am not so naïve as to say, “We don’t see the same words, so they must not exist,” for we know, having seen some brilliant teachers in the past, there are sneaky ways to get these skills in there, like hiding vegetables in a child’s dinner. For example, “3.LS.1 Analyze evidence…” can definitely be interpreted by an instructor to mean “Develop

critical thinking and analysis skills". And "1. CA.4: Solve real-world problems…" for first grade math can fall under problem solving. Active learning and learning strategies are just good elements of the teaching profession, and children should be exposed to those every day—no problem. All of these standards, and many more I did not list, have a visible—and almost literal—connection to practical skills.

With the Future of Jobs Survey prediction, some may make the claim these are the skills driving American society forward, therefore are the skills we should be focusing on in our classrooms. We seem to have a plan of action for most, but take a look at these three:

- Emotional Intelligence
- Creativity, originality, and initiative
- Leadership and social influence

Where in our standards can we see these? The plain answer is we cannot. There are not any standards for them, and the existing standards leave no room to address them either. This leaves us, as educators, little to no space to draw connections between these skills and what students are being told to practice. What they practice is what is on the tests, one of the most highly regarded aspects of school. Though many have fought over the weight of standardized assessments, the truth is that they still remain as a leading force in our classrooms. Despite these skills not being highlighted on exams, they are still valuable skills all children should leave school with in their back pocket.

Consider it this way: If we are teaching students valuable lessons and nonacademic skills, in what ways are they able to demonstrate them during their time with us? Is it in the classroom? Or is it on tests? Ever since the No Child Left Behind act, the United States has made society focus on the progress of our schools—which is great; the community at large should consider how schools are performing—but they are looking at a limited view of our students and their abilities. We have to consider all variables involved in our assessments, and note that they were not fashioned to prove the admirable skills and background knowledge all of our students possess. **Instead, they were fashioned to serve as a meter of excellence to measure our students' and schools' success.** The strengths of a student who speaks another language, another who prepares meals for her siblings, and another who has moved each year of his life cannot be measured on a test—yet these characteristics still matter to the student, their development, and their overall place in our world. Students who understand the "system" prove this on assessments. They do not demonstrate creativity, leadership, kindness, or the ability to think for themselves.

Teaching these three skills can be trickier, but not impossible, and I will tell you how we are going to do it.

John Dewey, prominent philosopher and psychologist, published an article titled "The Educational Situation: As Concerns the Elementary School" in which he discussed practical learning. His theory was that in order for students to gain practical skills for life

they must be taught in an experience-based environment. At the time, urban factories were booming, and so “practical skills” went out the window. Dewey fought for reform, calling it “new education” in hopes that children would still leave school knowing more than just how to work on an assembly line. He did not succeed.

Nowadays, we are not so focused on the development of the industry and its factories, but instead on how to make the next great leaders, thinkers, and problem-solvers of tomorrow. They need emotional intelligence, creativity, and leadership skills in addition to the hundreds of academic standards. The point Dewey made is still just as relevant, in that students cannot connect these key concepts and skills without experience.

When we teach our students in the coming years, we cannot focus solely on the standards they are being tested on. We should not focus on just what society is asking of them. In order for our students to succeed in this life, they must understand the context of which their education comes from, and how it relates to them. That is what experience *is.* It does not rely on anybody but oneself.

Although what society expects from its future generations seems to change as often as the tide, James Harvey, a senior fellow at the Center on Reinventing Public Education, argues the skills most significant in the life of young people has remained untouched. It is “a mind equipped to think”. The standards and the skills will not matter if students cannot think and use them on their own.

Simply put, our education needs to be focused on allowing our students to think. We cannot hope, or wait, for our students to have an amazing or more memorable experience with another teacher. We, as elementary school teachers, have the opportunity, and responsibility, to help our students see what they are capable of and how they will best navigate this world, starting on the first day of kindergarten. It cannot—and should not—wait until college; especially given that some students may not have the opportunity to choose or pursue that path. It may be tempting to simply execute or deliver a lesson plan about any one of the state standards, but to achieve an environment made for thinking, we need to do less talking and more waiting, and less asking for answers and more asking of questions. There is no need to wait for "teachable moments" when we can create them every day. Giving students moments to ponder, and opportunities to think and be curious need to happen across the standards while explaining fractions, developing models to represent plant life, listening to one another in a whole class discussion, applying knowledge of Greek and Latin roots to new words, and so much more. Giving chances to think, process, analyze, and problem solve on their own should be what our lessons revolve around; and these chances for them to learn are out there, so long as we do not cover them up with lectures and empty lessons.

Yes, we should focus on the academic achievement of course, but take the time to notice how it is going to relate to *them.* They are the first priority, and should be the first step we take toward educating the future. That way, they can be confident in their adaptable, transferrable, and unique skills and become anything they dream of. Doctors, construction site managers, architects, performers, social workers, basketball

stars… who knows. Some of them might even become teachers. We will at least know they have become functioning members of a society ready to receive them. Today's policy and standardized tests are not going to educate in the ways students want or need, nor will they be the tools to create a capable, thought-driven, creative future generation. It cannot exist only there. It can, however, start with us. **Students** are the purpose of education. Let's stop teaching them what to think, and start teaching them *how* to think. Thank you.

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Appendix A: Research Paper from Educational Foundations 420

That Which We Call a School: By Any Other Name, Would it Serve as Well?

By: Brittany Mayfield

EDFO 420

11/20/2018

Institutions of varying kinds help fill needs in our country. Hospitals heal, fire and police stations rescue, groceries supply, and banks—*debatably*—save. One institution in particular exists in many places all at once, yet is forgotten about in the day to day: school. America (meaning the United States) has over two million schools scattered about its great land, but it seems to hold less of an eminence in the eyes of the public. In addition, the other aforementioned institutions have specific purposes that can rarely be debated. Schools are different in that every man, woman, and child have their own opinions on why it exists and what it is supposed to do. Some say schools are responsible for turning out model citizens, while others focus on the learning and educational opportunity it brings. For decades America has not been happy with what the schools are doing, yet cannot bring itself to cut ties with an institution that serves as both the supporter and creator of society (Dewey, 390). Children are required to attend school from age five to nearly eighteen, and their success is equated with that of the institution's. Schools constantly have administrators, parents, workers, CEO's, governors, and even presidents breathing down their back, watching them work from over a peering shoulder (Gardner, 1995, 101). This raises a plethora of questions concerning who is in charge of schools in America and whether or not the schools in question are capable of handling that pressure to constantly fulfill public desires. To fully understand schools and what they accomplish, as well as their effectiveness, potential, and goals—their intended purpose must be understood as well.

To begin, let me discuss the intended purpose of schools. According to Howard Gardner, American developmental psychologist and the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a school's purpose changes over time in order to best serve a society. Depending on what society wants at the

present moment schools must realign their institution to match. Not only does their purpose shift, but then of course the curriculum must follow suit whether that be through teaching literacy, developing specific values or attitudes, or even facilitating the idea of deep understanding (Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind,* 8). If a society wants to focus more on STEM related careers, for example, then schools would be responsible for including more science, math, technology, and engineering centered lessons and activities to prepare students appropriately. Although the terms "appropriate" and "effective" can be left open to interpretation, for the purposes of this analysis these words will be more tied specific content. Appropriate and effective responses for schools would be to raise children to become well educated adults. A good education, being the number one priority of what most societies want out of schools, is still subjective but can be narrowed down to mean solely what outcomes society expects. Gardner gives an example of other societies to remind readers that the term "well educated" is subjective to each community it is based in. For example, a Confucian society would value a person who can read calligraphic character, play music, draw a bow, and dress like a member of the gentry or warriors (116, 127). This is not something others envy or attempt to teach students in today's modern society; however it is beneficial to point out what other societies value in order to understand a broader picture of good, quality education. Gardner points out that "effective education" is simply just "an education that yields greater understanding in students," which seems to leave a lot of room for interpretation (145). Effective education could vary anywhere between knowing how to apply new knowledge in certain circumstances to being inspired and wanting to learn more. Historically speaking the term "effectiveness" has seemed to mean that the school or institution is doing its job. Similar to how a factory produces parts, a school produces educated members of a society. Schools are asked to create model citizens who are creative thinkers and problem

solvers without knowing what makes the outcome effective or not. It appears they must walk virtually blind until further feedback is expressed.

There is a wide debate regarding what the purpose of school is and how effective the outcomes are, but most experts and researchers can agree schools are meant to serve the community in some way by educating the youth. Diane Ravich, passionate author and editor of dozens of books regarding school and education reform, refers to the core mission of the institution as a way for the education system to "live up to our nation's ideals", giving school an almost utopian expectation (Ravitch, 25). It appears as though Ravich is describing an impossible task: schools need to produce citizens who fit the ideal for a broken society that is less than perfect. The outcome is much more ideal than it is reality, yet schools are left with this major task at their feet. With society and its expectations not seeming to be equivalent, many schools get caught in a bind between teaching what they know is expected of them and showing students more of the world beyond their communities. Regardless what schools believe, there are certain goals they must meet. This would imply that our schools do not have minds of their own—or maybe, they are not the mind that controls the rest of the moving body. In fact, many believe that not only does the school have the responsibility to provide for society, but that it must *listen* to society. Gardner paints this picture perfectly by highlighting how schools are set apart from the rest of the community; buildings attempting to operate independently, but stuck fighting for a place against noneducational media (Gardner, The Unschooled Mind, 138). Not only are desires made known by the community, but the goals for operation of school as an institution are written by those who pay the most money (129, 139-140). Over the years, members of this American society have fought over what the right decisions are for schools. The social elite demanded schools to become centralized, putting administration at the forefront of

control. By the 1960's, however, parents and activists were calling for decentralization. This was all about control—the public could not decide if they wanted local school boards or themselves to sit at the steering wheel (Ravitch, 5). Seeing that these individuals are also the taxpayers literally *investing* in the school, it makes sense as to why their voice matters so much. They are also determining the quality of the future for the youth as well as the potential outcomes for the society at large.

Gardner mentions, in his lesser known publication "Limited Visions, Limited Means: Two Obstacles to Meaningful Education Reform", the public's desires and perceptions of what goes on inside the school walls. He states that the public believes teacher jobs to be pleasurable, undemanding, and enviable due to the tenure stipulations and working conditions. In addition, the public wants more testing, more training of basic skills, fewer "frills", and a tighter grip on discipline. This makes it clear that the public perception of schools' abilities and power are not equal to that of reality. There is seemingly no room for error despite schools being human institutions—meaining there must be some flexibility in order to function properly. If the school seems broken to them—which is seemingly up to the individual—then two actions must occur. First, the school must satsify the public concerns, or else they will never make progressive headway. Secondly, it must convince the public that school reform is safe and the children will achieve great benefits due to the change (Gardner, 102). These two actions are referring to reform in a general sense, which has been being used as a method of change for centuries. Arguably, the missing piece in the equation is the conversation happening between the public and the schools. Unfortunately, in Gardner's eyes, this genuine dialogue between educators and the general public has hardly begun (103). Subjectivity, past experiences, and value of educaiton all play roles into how society views and percieves success of schools, hence why it appears they

still want change. This raises the question as to whether or not schools will ever be rid of criticism or gently come to a hault on reform. As long as indivdiuals think on their own they will also have opinions, primarily about school and its purpose. With these facts in line perpetually, it appears that schools will never be able to comfortably sit atop their accomplishments regarding student success and society demands. Constantly learning and adapting, the school as an institution must find a way to grow and expand to fit the needs of all students—inside and outside of school hallways.

In order to be deemed effective, in addition to listening to society, schools must find ways to educate the youth in a manner that attempts to reach these goals set for them. Schools in America appear to be independent and autonomous when it comes to their curriculum. Despite this free thought, there is no evidence to show such autonomy. Unlike other institutions, schools are not capable of making their own statements, moving when necessary, or expanding without the permission of the community first. As a nation, no comprehensive curriculum exists as a one-size-fits all, which gives the school a bit of say in how it stretches to meet the needs of every learner—if it is capable of doing so. Gardner provides evidence for this very issue; in addition he exposes what society desires and promotes a strong argument for "education for understanding" in schools. This is to mean a sufficient or solid take on skills that may apply in future situations or problems (The Unschooled Mind, 16). Interesting that Gardner mention this in his work as did many other reformers of the time. Learning at school is not a revolutionary idea by any means; however, including it on the laundry list of things to do made it seem like a radical thought. With education for understanding students would be learning both about the world around them and how to be productive within it. Taking a broader look at education in America over the past few centuries, history notes how early schools focused on sacred texts, vernacular, arithmetic, and

important events or figures through rote memorization. This was to prepare the youth for leadership, trade, and being informed members of society (128). Modern schools in America, to contrast, focus on three distinct cateogories of knowledge. Regardless of discipline, they focus on notational sophistication, concepts within the discipline, and forms of exposition and reasoning. Though trade, leadership, and basic understandings of our society seem to be valid and favorable concepts still, schools have had to shift their education in order to better match what society deems more important (132). Even simple lessons regarding respect, honesty, and kindness would be deferred as responsiblities for the home, church, or community, leaving school to teach the "basic literacies" (131). Giving a well-rounded, and sometimes humorous, perspective on such a deeply rooted issue Gardner shines a light on the opinion of Journalist Tracy Kidder, which states:

> *It's as if a secret committee, now lost to history, had made a study of children and, having figured out what the greatest number were least disposed to do, delcared that all of them should do it," (qtd. in Gardner, The Unschooled Mind, 138).*

According to prominent philosopher and psychologist, John Dewey, in his article "The Educational Situation: As Concerns the Elementary School", practical learning for the home and neighborhood was swept away when urban factories began popping up (387). This was arguably a shock to the school system at the time as the entire educational philosophy was ripped up by its roots. Not only that, but this caused a disconnect which we still see today, between what students are tested on and what they are expected to do in the real world. Dewey recognized this break in education and called for experience-based practical learning to help children and young adults

form a habit of inquiry, calling it “new education”. (387). This form of education would allow children to be curious and encourage them to problem solve, design, invent, question, and learn. As we can see in our modern schools, this type of reform did not stick as Dewey had hoped.

A more recent researcher of education, though just as passionate, Dr. Carol Lee, also discusses what institutions are expected to teach based on community values. As a professor of Education at Northwestern University, Lee has been in the field for some time and has listened to community voices. She articulates her ideology well, stating the values educators teach revolve around similar variables: Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, motivation, attachments to people, a sense of ability (whether that be fixed or malleable), conception of task, ability to learn to accomplish goals, and whether scaffolds or supports which are available (Lee, 271). These aspects of learning are not what dictate education, but instead are the elements that affect how students are taught and how they learn. Each variable is tied to the culture and the community heavily, and so their existence is contingent solely on how much the surrounding environment values them. Of course, children are taught how to read, write, and do arithmetic (the famous Three R’s); but Lee argues that culture is where the real debate of educaiton occurs (Ravitch, 230 & Lee, 268). From the 1960’s forward, there has been an intentional teaching of culture in our schools, as well as a perspective lending it the power to be seen as a postive resource for learning (Lee, 267). Lee’s understanding of culture (in the context of school and the community) breathes an important element into the modern definition of education. It finds a way to combine the “new education” methods Dewey spoke of with the necessity to teach according to society’s wants and needs as Gardner argues. Learning through the context of culture also provides students the opportunity to learn vital roles and how to socialize, which prepares them for a future as a member of the community. This role fulfillment could be easily compared to that of teaching

students the skill sets required for factory life, though contextual learning is arguably more applicable and broad (268). Not only does it dive into many dimensions of the students' lives, but the community needs the participation of the students in order to create the context initially (268). Culture within society would not exist without its members. This only to say that schools are capable of teaching more than they are asked, though seeing this may take more effort and vision than initially planned. Students must learn about culture to survive in this world, and luckily it can be attached to any sort of lesson, standard, or background.

The last aspect to share is the challenges schools face when doing what society wants and following the standards given—a rock and a hard place. As Gardner opens his book with, "even when (a school) elicits the performances which it has been designed, it typically fails to achieve its most important missions," (Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind*, 2). By definition, expectations are not meant to be achieved fully, or at least they are not a guarentee. Unfortunately for schools there are constant pressures forcing them to fill the multiple needs of all students in the community. They must do so despite any limitations or setbacks that exist (16). As stated previously, many other authorities and powers seek out the opportunity to dictate what goes on inside the school's walls. Beyond school boards, some of these might be teacher or administrative unions, state legislatures, and the voting public. Not only are these individuals and groups in charge of making decisions for schools, but many times they have little to no experience with or understanding of daily practices of education (139). This causes a gap between society and school, as well as builds up high and unobtainable expectations. Even Dewey identified this issue when writing his article nearly one hundred years before Gardner wrote his, mentioning that there were "inevitable" obstacles school must endure. Seeing that school is an institution, America was attempting to mechanicize it and produce tiny workers.

Meanwhile, reformers (like Dewey) were calling for experience-based learning activities (Dewey, 387). Schools are stuck powerless, like sitting ducks, awaiting their next instruction or dramatic shift in curriculum. Many have witnessed this very frustration occur during the middle of a semester when an experienced teacher comes in frantic, disheveled, griping about a "curriculum change in the middle of the year!" and suddenly the classroom feels as though it has been flipped upside down. It can happen at any moment. Take No Child Left Behind (NCLB), for example. As Ravitch explains superbly, the induction of NCLB caused the country to be hyper-aware of accountability in schools, making the institution feel more like an accounting firm (Ravitch, 16, 98). Schools, which were initially focused on effort, transitioned to caring about improved quality of education through a system described as "Measure, then punish or reward," (16). Schools were pressured into bringing up scores by means necessary, dangling their own security and value over their heads if these expectations were ever questioned.

To add to the pressure schools face based on success and accountability, countless individuals believe a large number of America's problems are linked to school systems and institutions (Gardner, "Limited Visions, Limited Means: Two Obstacles to Meaningful Education Reform", 103). Rates covering drug usage, violence, and crimes are shown to have a direct correlation to whether someone finishes school or not. Many people today are denied jobs or even ridiculed if they do not know how to complete specific tasks, making school seem almost like a conditioning assembly line than a place of true understanding and learning. It seems there is no room to foster growth of common skills such as creativity, analytical thinking, communication, or problem solving. Instead, there are new tasks added by lawmakers and union representatives every year which changes the content schools teach but not the way in which they teach it. The goals are clearly defined and schools are expected to achieve them; however,

the problem lies with those in power making rules for the institution who spend little to no time in it.

Schools are expected to carry the weight of a society on their shoulders in terms of test scores and annual progress reports. The future of the surrounding community lies in their hands, yet they are not given any of the freedom necessary to effectively make change or teach the content that will further grow the individuals whose lives they touch. This amount of responsibility on the part of the schools seems overwhelming and furthers the disconnect between it and society. There are many opportunities schools can provide when able to freely invite and welcome all students in, as well as the knowledge they carry and the curiosity they want to share in. Stifiling our modern schools has not brought us any closer to a society full of creative minds nor critical thinkers—we seem just as far away as when Dewey first began questioning education. However, there is hope for positive and productive reform, as long as the communication between those who need schooling and those who provide it stays honest, open, and continual; because without that, school is nothing but a name.